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Ghana's Complex Road Toward Civilian Rule

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GHANA'S COMPLEX ROAD TOWARD CIVILIAN RULE

Ghana's governing National Liberation Council (NLC), a joint army-police junta strongly oriented toward the West, is entering the crucial phase of its transitional rule. Since overthrowing the totalitarian and pro-Communist regime of Kwame Nkrumah in February 1966, the NLC's performance in solving Ghana's complex political and economic problems has been generally creditable. It has exposed the former regime's corruption and misrule, adopted stringent economic austerity measures, completed a new draft constitution, and re-established constructive relations with Western countries as well as with Ghana's moderate West African neighbors.

Two years of junta rule have brought some disillusionment and criticism, and much of the economic and political muddle left by Nkrumah still exists. Moreover, the junta is confronted with further important decisions on returning power to civilians, with mounting criticism of its economic policies, increasing pressures from politicians to lift the ban on political activity, and growing restiveness from a labor force chafing under the accumulated sacrifices of two years of austerity. Nevertheless, the vast majority of Ghanaians generally still support the NLC, which--despite strains among key members--appears to have the cohesiveness needed for an eventual orderly transfer of power, probably in 1970, although national elections could come as early as 1969.

The Legacy of the Nkrumah Regime

Politically, the NLC is still confronted with the structural and doctrinal legacies of Nkrumah and his Convention People's Party (CPP). Despite the fact that the party has been dismantled and its image blackened by disclosures of party corruption and mismanagement, vestiges of the party's country-wide organization remain. Popular acceptance of Nkrumah's power structure was largely attrib-

utable to indoctrination through massive and sustained propaganda. The expectations instilled by Nkrumah's flamboyant versions of Marxist-Leninist socialism have inevitably made it more difficult for the NLC to implement its economic austerity program.

The political vacuum created by Nkrumah's authoritarian rule may be the more enduring legacy of his regime, because all elements of Ghanaian society, from

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tribal institutions to modern trade unions, were reshaped to some extent under his rule. Even though the NLC has in large measure restored individual and institutional freedoms, no political movement has yet shown the capability of evoking broad national support. Aspirants to political leadership in a future civilian government have tended to abandon their former national platforms and to solicit support from pressure groups that share their particular interests.

Economically, the NLC discovered at the time of the coup that the large foreign exchange reserves held by Ghana at independence had been squandered, foreign debts had risen to some \$600 million, and the budget was grossly out of balance. The most visible ills included rapid inflation, rising unemployment, and declining personal incomes. Although the falling price of cocoa--Ghana's main crop--on the world market contributed to the deterioration, the basic economic chaos was essentially due to irrational government policies involving expenditures which were never matched by revenues.

Political Reconstruction

The basically conservative NLC immediately undertook a massive redirection of Nkrumah's foreign and domestic policies. Junta members asserted that their objectives were to rehabilitate the economy, to restructure political and social institutions along liberal, democratic lines, and then step down. The two prime movers in the coup--Major General

Emmanuel K. Kotoka and Police Inspector General John W. K. Harlley--were the key figures in the NLC throughout the first year, although Lieutenant General Joseph A. Ankrah was installed as NLC chairman. During its first year, the most constructive step taken by the NLC toward restoration of civilian rule was the establishment of the Constitutional and Electoral Commissions in the fall of 1966. Formation of these commissions served to dilute criticism from restive Ghanaian politicians that nothing was being done to restore civilian government. By requiring the Constitutional Commission to undertake extensive consultations prior to drawing up the constitution, however, the NLC served notice that it intended to follow a slow, deliberative transitional process.

Internal security was a major preoccupation of the junta during these early months. Efforts by Nkrumah to foment a counter coup from his refuge in Guinea greatly alarmed the junta.

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The junta's confident manner was rudely shattered on 17 April 1967 when a small group of junior officers and men from one army squadron attempted to overthrow the junta. The officers who directed the coup attempt were inspired by personal ambition, grievances over neglect of the army, and suspicions of corruption in the

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regime. Although the attempted coup collapsed of its own ineptitude, it was in some way beneficial because it not only pointed up critical weaknesses in Ghana's internal security systems but also made the senior military officers on the NLC keenly aware that they had neglected to attend properly to the key commands they had retained.

In addition, the abortive coup had a profound psychological impact on the junta because General Kotoka was killed by the rebels in the melee. This eventually resulted in a realignment of the power relationships within the junta, with Ankrah--one of the more politically ambitious NLC members--assuming a more significant role.

The NLC altered the executive structure of the government in June 1967 in order to permit civilians to play a more significant role in the management of government affairs. Civilian commissioners, mostly senior civil servants, were installed to direct the majority of the government ministries. An Executive Council, roughly analogous to a ministerial cabinet and comprising all commissioners and NLC members, was created as a show-piece policy-making body. Although this move was favorably received by the public, it soon became apparent that the NLC had in no way abdicated its basic supremacy in the decision-making process.

The last half of 1967 was marked by vacillation and indecision within the NLC, mainly

because of sharp disagreements over the extent of the political disabilities to be imposed on former CPP activists in the new civilian regime. The log jam in the NLC was finally broken, under strong pressure from Harlley, in January 1968 with the issuance of three decrees.

The first decree excluded from public office for ten years all former high officials of the Nkrumah government, the CPP, and CPP ancillary organizations, although provision was made for some exemptions. The second decree provided for the election--not yet scheduled--of a Constituent Assembly to review the draft constitution. The third provided for an interim electoral commissioner who would be responsible for registration of voters and the conduct of elections.

The multiheaded executive structure provided for in the draft constitution may create jurisdictional problems in the future. Although the President is described as a "nonexecutive," he is given powers in the constitution belying that description. The executive is rounded out by a Council of State, a National Security Council, a prime minister, and a cabinet drawn from both within and without parliament.

Economic Retrenchment

Once in power, the NLC embarked on a two-year program to stabilize the chaotic economy, seeking first to restore a balance between Ghana's available resources and the level of its commitments. The new regime,

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while encouraging the growth of the private sector and foreign investment, moved to reduce intense inflationary pressures and the budget deficit. It terminated prestige projects, stopped some notoriously unprofitable state enterprises and tightened control over others, and cut down on government development expenditures.

Restrictions on bank credit stabilized the money supply; the upward movement in prices slowed considerably in 1966 and actually declined in the latter half of 1967. The Ghanaian currency was devalued, imports of nonessential items were halted, and other measures were taken to redress Ghana's trade imbalance. At the same time, the regime reached agreements with its principal creditor nations to defer most debt repayments until after June 1967 and also to allow Accra to repay its debts over a much longer period after that date.

The rehabilitation program has been supported primarily by aid from the International Monetary Fund and the US. This aid, plus smaller amounts of assistance from other nations, has been used mainly to relieve balance-of-payments difficulties and to import raw materials to revitalize Ghana's idle productive capacity.

The gains made in correcting Ghana's economic ills have had their price. Over 60,000 persons were laid off during 1966 and 1967, mainly from government pay-

rolls. Construction activity has declined substantially. Ghana's economic output stagnated in 1966 and increased only slightly in 1967. The most pressing problem continues to be the lack of sufficient foreign exchange to pay for food imports, raw materials, and spare parts. A continued high level of foreign assistance will be needed to offset an expected foreign exchange shortfall of \$70-80 million in 1968.

In addition, the future of the NLC's policy of encouraging private foreign investment has been clouded at least temporarily by the furor created late last year when Accra attempted to divest itself of a Hungarian-built, state-owned pharmaceutical plant, one of the ill-planned, overly expensive projects undertaken by Nkrumah. Abbott Laboratories of Chicago negotiated a contract to invest in and operate the plant but withdrew when the terms came under heavy attack from the Ghanaian press and intellectual community. Although the outcry reflected the regime's failure to enlist public support for its divestment policy and the political haymaking by aspiring politicians, it also indicated that many educated Ghanaians, perhaps conditioned by the Nkrumah era, still believe that foreign private investment could lead to alien political control.

The Junta Remains Cohesive

Ankrah, Harlley, and, to a lesser extent, Akwasi A. Afrifa

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are the most important members of the NLC; junta unity is essentially dependent on how well these three get along. Although the junta has been able to maintain a fairly consistent public facade of unanimity, intense personal rivalries have developed and serious disagreements have occasionally arisen, some so bitter as to threaten the junta's stability.

In the NLC's first year of rule, the most serious strain occurred in January 1967 when Kotoka and Afrifa, contending that Ankrah was ineffectual and guilty of tribal favoritism, sought to remove him from office. Although tensions ran high for a time, the plans were dropped, largely through the intervention of Harlley.

Frictions between Harlley and Ankrah rose sharply in the fall of 1967. Disturbed by Ankrah's tendency to look upon himself as the real fount of power in Ghana, Harlley moved to curtail the NLC chairman's widespread powers in the area of national defense by proposing the creation of a Defense Council for "administering" the armed forces and "advising" the NLC on defense policies. Although Ankrah protested angrily when the plan was unveiled at an NLC meeting, all other junta members unanimously supported Harlley, and the Defense Council has subsequently been institutionalized.

Given his unpredictability and uneven temperament, Afrifa is fully capable, in a fit of pique or impatience, of shatter-

ing the junta's solidarity. Despite at least one reprimand for his intemperate public pronouncements, he again incurred the wrath of other NLC members last month by prematurely announcing NLC plans to issue a new bank law, and by reshuffling on his own authority the management of the national banks. Faced again with censure, Afrifa promptly submitted his resignation, withdrawing it only after Harlley and senior government officials intervened to mediate the crisis.

Restive Politicians and Pressure Groups

Several identifiable political groupings are now jockeying for position in anticipation that restrictions will soon be taken off political activity. None appears to have a cohesive national structure, and public speculation and debates have centered primarily around a small number of personalities.

Dr. Kofi A. Busia, former leader of the United Party who was the leading anti-Nkrumah spokesman during seven years of exile, has held a pre-eminent place among political aspirants since his return to Ghana. He has used his positions as head of the National Advisory Council, a civilian advisory body to the NLC, and the junta-sanctioned Center for Civic Education as legitimate platforms for expounding his political views.

Nevertheless, Busia has failed to initiate a dynamic political movement, and many of his

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Members of the National Liberation Council (NLC)

Joseph A. ANKRAH
Lt. Gen.; Commander
in Chief, Ghana Armed
Forces

*Chairman of NLC since coup; blunt, force-
ful, impatient with delays; installed by
leaders of 24 February coup who needed a
senior moderator; has gradually asserted
actual leadership*

Age 52; Member
of Ga Tribe

John W. K. HARLEY
Inspector General of
Police

*Deputy Chairman of NLC since coup; played
key role in overthrow of Nkrumah; his con-
tinuing leadership, based on his firm com-
mand of the police and his subtly strong
personality, has kept the junta unified*

Age 49; Member
of Ewe Tribe

Akwasi A. AFRIFA
Brig.; Commandant
Ghana Military Academy

*Youngest NLC member; colorful, brash,
mercurial; often takes independent position
on controversial issues; inclusion in NLC
due primarily to decisive role of his unit
in the coup; his impetuosity has at times
caused tensions in the NLC*

Age 33; Member of
Chiefly Family of
Ashanti Tribe

Anthony K. DEKU
Commissioner of Police

*NLC member responsible for intelligence
and security; trusted deputy to fellow Ewe
tribesman Harley; their longtime profes-
sional collaboration has extended to polit-
ical solidarity*

Age 45; Member of
Ewe Tribe

Emmanuel K. KOTOKA
Maj. Gen.; deceased
17 April 1967

*A prime mover in the overthrow of Nkrumah,
he was a key member of the NLC until
killed in the April 1967 mutiny of an army
unit*

Age 41 at Death;
Member of Ewe Tribe

John E. O. NUNOO
Commissioner of Police

*Pleasant, ineffectual, and largely without
influence in the NLC; included in junta be-
cause of seniority in police; has gained
some influence with fellow Ga tribesman
Ankrah*

Age 51; Member of
Ga Tribe

Albert K. OCRAN
Maj. Gen.; Commander
of Army

*Stabilizing factor in NLC; has shown little
taste for political power and has given
primary attention to military duties; usually
supports Harley and Deku on major issues*

Age 38; Member
of Fanti Tribe

Bawa A. YAKUBU
Deputy Commissioner of
Police

*Sole northerner on the NLC; professional
policeman with few political ambitions; has
maintained bland relations with all NLC
colleagues*

Date of Birth
Unknown; Member
of Dagomba Tribe

Key Junta Members



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HARLEY



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Dr. Kofi A. BUSIA

supporters question whether he has the necessary appeal to win an election. Certain "hawkish" party elements favor increased party organizational efforts in the regions now, and some even advocate setting up an overt party headquarters and launching a public campaign. Even if forced to change his moderate and cautious tactics, Busia's prospects of commanding a new interregional coalition comparable to the United Party a decade earlier do not seem auspicious.

Another prime contender for political leadership is Komla A. Gbedemah. He was once minister of finance under Nkrumah, later incurred Nkrumah's disfavor, and became an opposition leader abroad. Although somewhat tainted by his early association with Nkrumah, he has the organizing ability, mastery of tactical maneuvering, and personal magnetism needed to fashion a new party, and he is

capable of mobilizing a majority of former CPP supporters while evading the onus of "Nkrumaism." He probably can count on the support of senior civil servants who fear that a party led by Busia might purge officials who once collaborated with Nkrumah.

The only civilian personality to emerge since Nkrumah's fall who may be able to match Busia's and Gbedemah's potentialities for leading a significant political organization is Dr. John Bilson, a prominent Kumasi physician. Bilson's following, known as the "Libertarians," was organized in 1966 by young professional men in Kumasi who, disillusioned with all politicians of the Nkrumah era, are determined to launch a new national party manned primarily by the younger educated elite. Although the Libertarians have gained a few substantial centers of support, Busia and Gbedemah reportedly have been disturbed enough to approach Bilson with the idea of merging forces.

The entrance of certain NLC members--namely Ankrah and Afrifa--could add a new dimension to the prospective national elections. Ankrah, whose penchant for dabbling in politics has occasionally irritated other junta members, is attempting to build a power base among his fellow Ga tribesmen. He claims to have received overtures from United Party adherents to accept the position of president on a ticket with Busia as prime minister.

As the only Ashanti tribesmen in the NLC, Afrifa is strategically

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placed to rally Ashanti support for Busia, and has publicly praised Busia for his contribution to Ghana's political reconstruction. The deep reservoir of personal popularity accumulated by Afrifa as a consequence of his role in the coup of 24 February and his projection of a charismatic image has inevitably led to speculation that he may eventually supplant Busia as a leader of an intertribal coalition similar to the old United Party.

Although small in membership, Ghana's trade unions may exert substantial political pressure in any future political campaign. Political aspirants are already courting labor leaders, some of whom have political ambitions of their own. The rash of strikes and other forms of worker protest which occurred in the latter months of 1967 suggests that labor's patience is beginning to wear thin under continued austerity and government limitations on union activity. Trade union leaders themselves have begun to soft pedal labor restraint, to press labor's case with unexpected boldness, and to question the regime's labor policies.

Ghana's educated elite, large by African standards, has also become more influential on the national political scene. University professors and journalists have begun to speak out sharply and critically, though sometimes irresponsibly, on major national issues. Although essentially conservative and anti-Nkrumaist, many of these intel-

lectuals, believe the NLC to be too dependent on the West. They were largely responsible for the wave of criticism which prompted Abbott Laboratories to withdraw from its planned investment in Ghana's State Pharmaceutical Corporation.

Foreign Policy

In international relations, the NLC has reiterated its allegiance to the ideals of African unity and the aims of liberation movements, while at the same time repudiating the radical pan-Africanist policies of the former regime. Because of the subversive threat posed by Nkrumah from his refuge in Guinea, the NLC has devoted much time to restoring constructive political and economic relations with the adjacent states of the Ivory Coast, Upper Volta, and Togo. Guinea, which has given Nkrumah asylum since March 1966, remains the greatest foreign policy problem for the NLC in Africa. The bitter feud between the two countries will probably not diminish until Nkrumah leaves Guinea.

Because foreign policy under the NLC is principally molded by Ankrah and Harlley--both of whom are pro-West and strongly anti-Communist--the junta's pro-Western orientation will continue as long as they continue as junta members. The junta has nevertheless maintained diplomatic and trade ties with the Soviet Union and six East European Communist states. It is quite pragmatic in its relations both inside and outside of Africa, and it will give careful

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consideration to opportunities for trade and assistance from any quarter.

Outlook

It is apparent that the economic rehabilitation of Ghana has just begun. Prospects for further substantial economic growth remain uncertain, and diversification of the agricultural sector is still a distant goal. Ghana's existing infrastructure offers some opportunity for industrial growth, but continued criticism of the NLC's policy of attracting foreign investment could have serious effects on economic stabilization and development. Although the current level of unemployment poses little immediate threat to the regime, the recent unrest in labor ranks will make it difficult for the NLC to maintain its policy of economic austerity.

Ghana's oversized army, a trained but poorly equipped military force, remains a security threat to the NLC and to any future civilian regime. An atmosphere of uncertainty and suspicion is still prevalent among Ghanaian officers as a result of the April 1967 coup attempt. The NLC has not found a significant role for the army to play in national reconstruction, but is reluctant to disband any substantial part of the force for fear of creating conditions which might be exploited by politically ambitious officers.

Time could work in favor of the forces tending to divide the NLC, despite the fact that junta members have thus far maintained a consensus on vital issues. The sense of revolutionary urgency of the immediate postcoup period has given way to politics as usual, and junta members will find it increasingly tempting to air their differences publicly on major issues.

Notwithstanding these problems, junta members appear to have strengthened their determination to turn power over to civilians in an orderly fashion, a move some of them now believe can be made next year. The cohesiveness of Ghanaian society should abet the NLC in this task. Unlike some other African countries, Ghana has neither regional nor tribal divisions of a magnitude to threaten national unity, and Ghanaians generally have a well-developed sense of nationality.

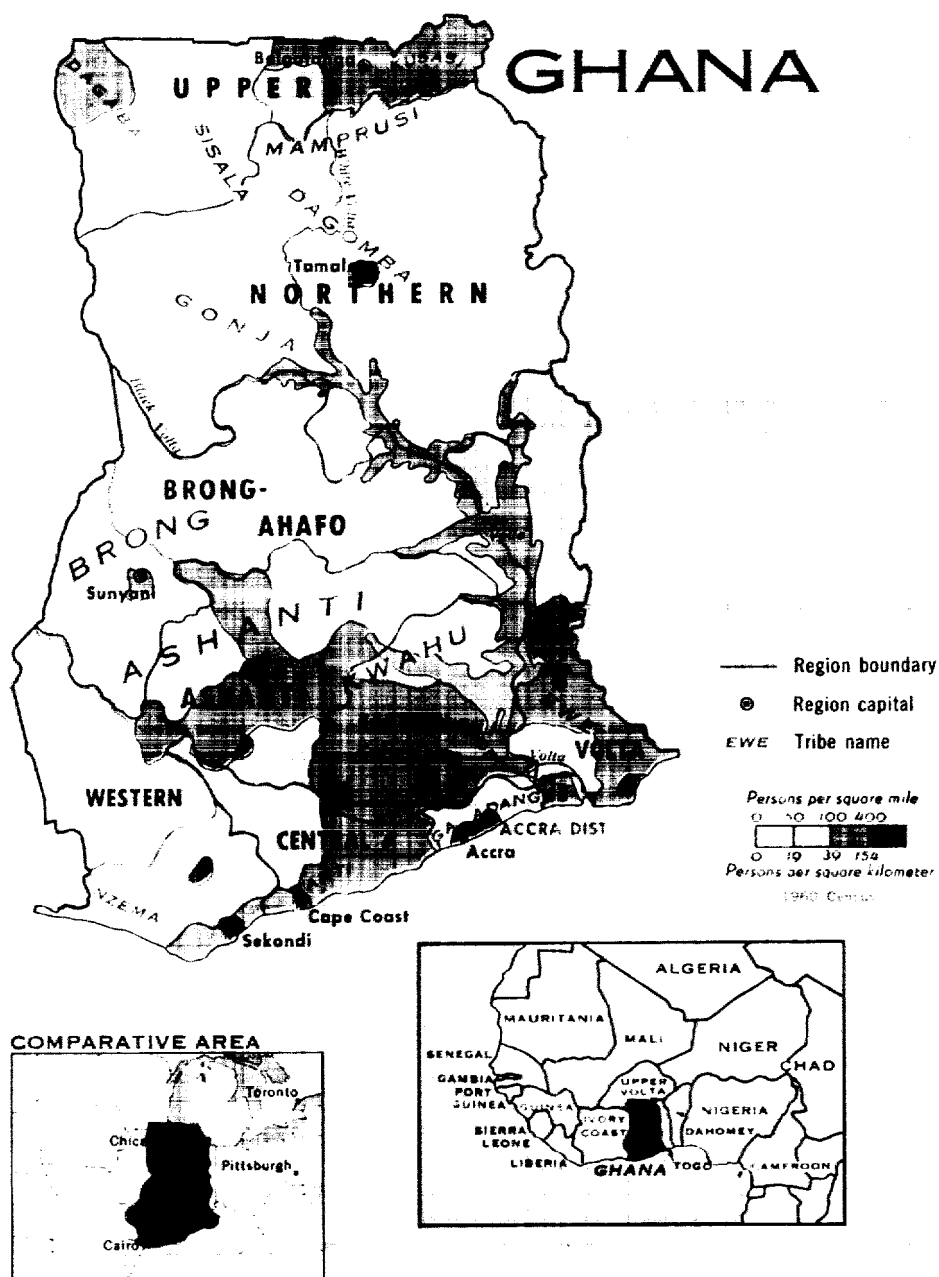
Ghana's present military leaders can be expected to take a proprietary attitude toward any future civilian regime in order to preclude the re-emergence of a regime espousing radical Nkrumaist policies. In the long run, however, resolution of the country's complex economic problems will be the critical factor in the successful development of a politically stable Ghana.

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